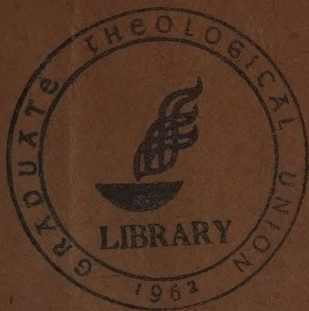


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# MYTHICAL AND LEGENDARY ELEMENTS IN THE NEW TESTAMENT

BY SAMUEL J. BARROWS

[S. J.]

Reprinted from THE NEW WORLD for June, 1899.

Dorchester  
Boston  
U. S. A.



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B279

## MYTHICAL AND LEGENDARY ELEMENTS IN THE NEW TESTAMENT.

SOME months ago I took up a little French book on mythology, and on the opening page read the following definition: "Mythology: the name for the collection of fables, or erroneous beliefs, which form the basis of the religion of the Greeks and Romans and of all other peoples of the world, with the exception of the Jews."<sup>1</sup>

If this definition of mythology were final, it would altogether exclude my subject from consideration. It is but the reflection of a common opinion concerning the exceptional character of the literature of the Old and New Testaments. If this attitude is found in a primer, it is found also in encyclopædias and text-books. In what general encyclopædia, for instance, will one find any presentation of either Hebrew or early Christian mythology? The definition I have quoted is designed to perpetuate and protect a literal and prosaic interpretation of the Old and New Testaments. It assumes that the brilliant imagination which lights up the pages of Homer, and is reflected in colder rays in the polished mirror of Virgil, and which burns almost with fierceness in the Teutonic sagas, was never kindled in the sacred literature of Christianity, or even in the literature of the Hebrews. It makes the Bible a prosaic, matter-of-fact book. Strangely enough, the very interpretation which excludes all mythical elements from the Bible is itself based on a mythological conception, that God dictated literally and verbally the form and substance of those records, — a conception as purely mythological as that Athene sprang from the brain of Zeus.

We are coming slowly to recognize mythical elements in the Old Testament, and to see that we have there a large body of traditions in great need of classification. We find the mythologizing tendency in some of its earliest and simplest forms, and, as we should expect, close parallels to the mythological conceptions

<sup>1</sup> *Petit Cours de Mythologie*, par E. Geruzez, Paris, 1889.



of surrounding nations. It is more than twenty years since Ignaz Goldziher applied the sun-myth theory to the interpretation of the Old Testament stories. I felt then, and feel now, that he pushed the comparison far beyond the limits of sound and safe criticism, just as some of the solar mythologists have pushed the theory too far in the interpretation of Greek myths. The weakness of Goldziher, however, was not in confounding mythical material with historic, but in assuming that most of the myths of the Old Testament must have originated from sun-myths, and in disregarding the action of other forces.

But it is less important for us to be able to trace the legendary and mythical portions of the Old and New Testaments to their early and ultimate source than it is to be able to identify them as mythical and legendary in their nature. In other words, it is one function of modern criticism to separate the elements which are purely poetic from those which are essentially historic. Then it is the function of the spiritual teacher to follow up the critic and to recognize the truth beautifully pictured by the imagination, as he recognizes the truth which is uttered in the colder formulas of prose and fact. The New Testament is a field which, in spite of the enormous amount of study bestowed upon it, has hardly been worked at all in this direction. I am not forgetting the attempts of Celsus, the early pagan critic, to apply in the second century principles of comparative mythology to the interpretation of early Christian traditions. In that remote time he gave us the hint of a method which is yet waiting for its full and more exact application. I do not forget the important work of Strauss, and the ardent study of the New Testament, especially of the gospels, which the work of Strauss incited. It stimulated fruitful attempts to establish the historical features of the books; it did not lead to a careful separation of the historical from the mythical. This sifting process is yet to take place. Valuable as may be the historic material resulting from its faithful application to the New Testament, we shall find that the imaginative material which the New Testament may furnish is not less valuable in bringing us into relation with the thought, the sentiment and the controlling ideas of the age in which it was written. History is too narrowly conceived when we regard it as a mere record of fact and actuality; history is also a record of the development of human consciousness. It is a record of illusions, ideals, conceptions, and inspirations which are part of the great motive forces of the world. Mythology itself may become his-

story, not with reference to the literal truth of the pictures it paints, but with reference to the psychological processes which produced them; it is part of the history of the human mind. The Hebrew cosmology, for instance, is of no value to us as science, for it does not tell truly the physical history of the universe, and it has been wholly displaced by modern geology, palæontology and astronomy; but it is of great value to us in the study of the Hebrew mind in its relation to theism.

The study of the New Testament then, not as a mere log-book of facts, a journal of events, but as a chromatic presentation of varied forms of human thought, infused with affection and radiant with imagination, is evidently to become as fascinating and as fruitful as the history which is revealed by the spade or by the alembic of analytical criticism. The sobriety and sincerity of modern criticism demand that we pursue this subject solely with reference to truth and without reference to dogmatic results. (We may not be indifferent to results, but our first business is to obtain them.)

At the outset it is necessary to define the term "mythical and legendary elements." I take these adjectives in their broadest sense. I do not purpose to draw subtle distinctions between them. I use one to supplement the meaning of the other. The Greek word *μῦθος* originally meant a word, anything delivered by word of mouth. Later it came to mean a tale, legend or fable of prehistoric time. The word "legend" suggests also something delivered by tradition. Its application was at first wholly ecclesiastical, and as defined by Mr. George P. Marsh it was "a previous history of sacred persons or miraculous events founded upon tradition, but practically or formally recognized by the church as authentic." Later it came to have a broader meaning in English, as it has in French, being applied to any fabulous occurrence in the Christian era which has come down through tradition. The whole mass of imaginative material in the New Testament needs a better classification than can be given to it by such general terms as myth, legend or tradition. Some of it, extremely important, cannot be described by any of these terms, but is the result of a distinct process of idealization. The word "mythical," as popularly used, expresses that which is absolutely non-existent or unhistorical, whereas in the New Testament, as in Homer, the mythical elements are often but the decoration of a real event or personage, or are pictorial forms of apostrophe.

The theory of Euhemeros that the Greek and Roman gods



resulted from the deification of human heroes held sway for centuries, and would certainly explain some of the later legends and personifications, but it could not explain the early nature-myths or their relation to each other. Euhemerism and rival theories have been displaced by the science of comparative mythology in which the myths or stories of different people are studied with reference to their historic, philological and psychological relationship. Some myths are but personifications of nature; others, according to Max Müller, are simply developments of metaphor. Others are survivals of early superstition; but we must still reserve a place for that idealization or apotheosis which Euhemerus recognized.

When we take in hand the mass of material in the New Testament which must be the direct product of the imagination, we may distinguish: (1) Parables in which fiction is used for moral purposes; (2) Visions in which truth is uttered through the imagination, like Peter's vision on the house-top, or Paul's vision on the journey to Damascus. The vision may be wholly subjective, a simple individual experience. Transposed into narrative it may sometimes come to be regarded as objective and historic, as in the story of the descent of the Holy Ghost at the baptism of Jesus. (3) Mythical material of Hebraic or still earlier origin which has hardened into belief, and furnished the basis of New Testament and later theology. (4) Stories which have had their origin in metaphors or proverbs. (5) Legendary accretions round a central idea, such as the messianic legends. (6) A process of ardent idealization resulting in the apotheosis of the central hero and furnishing the basis for a new development of Christian mythology.

If I have not catalogued nature-myths in this material, it is because I have found nothing in the New Testament, independent of the Hebrew myths, which can safely be so described. The New Testament age was too late for the direct formation of such myths. Of those which it adopted from the Hebrew mythology some were undoubtedly nature-myths to start with, but they had passed through many transformations before being embodied in the Christian records.

Concerning the parables, we have no difficulty. We see the imagination consecrated to the highest uses. They are thoroughly human in character; they are devoid of mythical, legendary or historical elements. We class the parables under the name of moral fiction, though they might just as well be called moral

truth. It is truth speaking through the imagination. We observe also that the question whether they are historic or not has nothing to do with the truth contained in them. Whether the incidents and circumstances are actual or supposed, the stories themselves are true to human nature and human life. It is easy to find the Levite to-day who passed by on the other side, as, thank heaven, it is not difficult to find the good Samaritan who bears the oil and the wine. We may be thankful that they have not fallen a prey to the literalists. Fascinating as it has been to me to behold the revelations of the spade at Athens and Olympia, and to see Dörpfeld, that archæological wizard, uncover at Hissarlik the Homeric Troy amid all the perplexing strata, I am profoundly thankful that no expedition has set out to find the jaw-bone of the beast which the Good Samaritan rode, to identify the inn where he stayed, or to find the place where the man buried his talent, in hopes that some of it might still be there. So in Peter's vision on the house-top, when he saw all manner of four-footed beasts and creeping things let down before him. Only a child would venture to think that there was actually a mid-air menagerie. The psychologist suggests that, though Peter was apparently asleep, his moral faculties were wide awake. The lesson of the vision is so noble that its grotesque form is forgotten.

Imagine an Oriental mind long fed on such stories and visions stopping in the midst of a parable to ask Jesus whether the thing actually happened or not! It is easy enough to see that the hearer was not intent on questioning about facts, but in trying to see the point of the story. If he missed that, (as he sometimes did,) he missed the whole thing. Now the people who had imagination enough to be addressed in such stories as Jesus addressed to them, had imagination enough to weave round his personality the glow of their admiration and wonder, and to infuse into their narratives of him their own pictorial conceptions of truth. It is of the highest importance to recognize these functions of the Oriental mind, though they are not absent from human nature anywhere, nor is their operation confined to any age. We have no difficulty with the parables, because they are simply moral pictures. A myth, or legend, is something different. It is a product of the imagination, taking in the New Testament some one of the forms I have indicated, and usually containing some marvelous element which has come to be accepted as historic fact.



The problem then before us is threefold. It is, first, to distinguish the mythical from the historical elements; second, to discover, if we can, the processes by which the mythical elements were developed; third, to discover what moral truth or error they may embody.

When we approach the whole body of imaginative material in the New Testament, what have we to aid us in distinguishing the mythical from the historic?

1. In the first place, we may be strongly influenced by internal evidence. This internal evidence is in many cases all that is necessary to distinguish between history and fiction, poetry and fact. The tendency of myth is to extravagance. All extravagance in narration, all display of the marvelous, requires verification. As the myth or legend is nearly always addressed to the sense of the marvelous, its growth is seldom complete until it lies far beyond the limits of actuality. The pleasure, the power, the authority, of a myth, as a general thing, consist in the boldness with which it is made to transcend the bounds of possibility. The very object of the story is to present something unnatural. The nearer it lies to the world of actuality, the more difficult it is to distinguish it from history. Take, for instance, the Homeric epics. We cannot always tell in the Iliad whether a city there mentioned by Homer really existed. We could not be sure, till Schliemann showed us with his spade, whether certain details in regard to the fabulous wealth of the house of Menelaus were historic or fanciful. They might have been either. Excavation showed what a historic basis this picture of ancient luxury had, just as the massive walls of Mycenæ prove that the epithet "well-walled" was not based on the imagination. On the other hand, when Homer describes the battles of the gods, the descent of Apollo on the mountain slopes with his death-dealing arrows, the ascent of Athene to heaven like a bird, and the transfiguration of Odysseus at the touch of a god, we know that we are dealing with mythical material. Such stories bear their own mythical evidence. Why? *Because they do not come within the range of human experience as fact, but do lie within the range of the human imagination as poetry.*

Every individual lives in two worlds, — a world of fact and a world of imagination. The world of imagination may have more influence upon his life than the world of fact about him; but unless he is morbid, insane, or willfully deceived, he does not confound the one with the other. [When he takes his illusions as



real, he may become dangerous to himself or to society.] In the same way we may distinguish (not always, but in most cases) from the physiognomy of a myth and the tale it has to tell us, whether it belongs to the world of reality or to that of the imagination. We ask instinctively whether this story or picture is connected with the world of cause and effect with which we are familiar, and in the constancy of which we believe, and within the domain of which all history is elaborated. If we find that a story or a picture, ancient or modern, conveyed by brush, tongue or pen, does not belong to the world of cause and effect as we know it, does not come within the range of well-attested human experience, we conclude that it is unhistoric. When some of the old painters introduce pictures of God on their canvas, or statues of centaurs or mermaids, we promptly regard them as mythical. We have seen men ride horseback, we have not seen a man-horse or a woman-fish. People in this age who believe such things possible do so because they base their belief not upon the actual world of experience, but upon a hypothetical world created by the imagination, and this imaginative world may be so strong as to overpower the reason and the senses.

Some months ago I attended a spiritualistic séance. After an hour I was able, by seizing one of the ghosts by both arms, feeling her pulse, and eventually securing the aid of the police, to connect her and her accomplice with the world of cause and effect with which I was familiar. But there were two men there, both of them intelligent, who confessed to me that they had paid several hundred dollars to witness these "spirit" exhibitions, night after night, for two years, and until the night of this exposure had believed in the truth of a palpable fraud. They had not seen with their eyes nor with their judgment, but with their imagination, though one of them acknowledged that he had his doubts one night, when one of the spirits coming up from the floor was stunned by knocking her head against the mantelpiece. In this case it was very easy for one who was not hypnotized by the illusion to apply the test and show the unreality of the whole transaction; but it was extremely difficult for those whose illusions had overpowered their senses to make the test. There was a luxury in yielding to the spell of the marvelous. The ease with which an expert magician can deceive the senses is familiar to all, but he does not deceive the judgment. The more extravagant his tricks, the more we refuse to believe in their reality, — that two rabbits can be rubbed into one or that a watch which

has been pounded in a mortar can be put together again by the wave of a hand.

The tests we apply to verify an event which we witness may be different from those which we apply to a record of something that is reported to us, be it in a daily newspaper, or be it in the New Testament. It may be possible for us to discover by following the process with the eye that the watch was not really smashed, or the rabbits unified. But when we have no opportunity to view or review the whole process, and have only the record of the result, we are inevitably obliged to rely on the sum of individual and of human experience. If it is difficult in our own day to distinguish between fact and illusion, at first hand and at second hand, we may not be surprised that it is sometimes difficult to distinguish between them in ancient records. But generally the task is not difficult, because the writer or compiler or recorder did not mean that it should be; he has made the boundaries between the ordinary and the marvelous sufficiently clear.

In these days of scientific achievement the modern fact may be more wonderful than the ancient fable. Homer's picture of Hermes rushing across the sea with his winged sandals appears to us wholly mythical, but a lightning message sent under the ocean we accept as historic. One is as marvelous as the other, and a few years ago both would have been considered equally impossible. One we are now able to verify as history; the other lives in the world of imagination, where verification is impossible. It is of no use to say that, because the lightning message under the ocean is now possible, therefore the winged Hermes might have been possible in the Homeric age; we know the processes and forces by which ocean telegraphy was made possible, and we can verify them every day; but there is no evidence that this Homeric myth belonged to the well-attested experience of that time. If it had so belonged, something else in the way of marvelous achievement would have been used to attest the divinity of the god. The ingenious attempts of rationalistic writers of the Paulus and kindred schools to turn all of the New Testament miracles into natural events were as ridiculous as it would be to apply the same method to Homer. They are clearly intended to describe unnatural events, and therefore we may claim that the internal evidence of many miracles and narratives is sufficient to identify them as myth or legend.

Secondly, we may sometimes trace the historic parentage of a myth. A New Testament myth may be traced to its cradle in



Judea or Assyria. We know what it is because we know where it came from. If it was a myth to start with, it was not possible for it to grow into a natural event; although, if it were originally a natural event, it is quite possible that it may have grown into a myth.

Thirdly, we may be able to trace the process by which a legend was developed in New Testament times, just as we can sometimes trace it in later days. Professor Harnack, in an article in the "*Preussische Jahrbücher*," has shown just how a legend may grow. But we need not go back so far as Dr. Harnack does to see the psychological process by which a legend is developed. We may see in our own day how naturally a story may grow into a local myth, without the slightest intention to mislead. To be as modern as possible, I will take a recent illustration from my own observation. Three years ago the First Church at Dorchester, Massachusetts, was burned. I was a sad witness of the spectacle. During the fire, two brave young men went into the church and saved the old clock. The flames coiled up round the steeple. On the top of it was a ball in which had been placed some memoranda of the history of the church. The steeple fell into the church and the ball with it. When the building had cooled off, a young man secured the ball. Somehow the facts about the rescue of the clock during the fire, and the securing of the ball after it, became blended as they went from mouth to mouth, until finally, when the story came to me only a week later, it was that a young man — who was not one of those who had saved the clock, and I am not sure that he was the one who had taken the ball — had climbed the steeple, as the flames were coiling about it, and had brought down the ball in triumph. Had the young man even made the attempt he would have perished like a moth in a Rochester lamp; but that did not matter, the story grew all the same and was just as mythical as anything in Homer. I mention it to show the psychological process by which legends and traditions may grow, and that our age is not an exception to its operation. It is this psychological process which needs to be studied in the growth of the New Testament. We have long had professors of New Testament theology, we need now professors of New Testament psychology.

Fourthly, another aid in helping us to separate the mythical from the historic in the New Testament is furnished by comparative mythology. This is a branch of scholarship which, while yet in its infancy, is also in its old age. It is in its infancy because it has

never yet been fully applied to the New Testament ; it is in its old age because one of the earliest pagan critics applied it most successfully to a study of the claims of Christianity. In "The Arena" for June, 1896, in an article on "Celsus and His Anticipations of Modern Thought," I tried to show that Celsus, seventeen hundred years ago, anticipated the science of comparative mythology, not in its details, but in its principles. He saw that the Christians and the Jews had a mythology as truly as the Greeks and the Egyptians, and he was fond of comparing one myth with another. For us the interest in his conjectures in comparative mythology is not that he succeeded in showing the identity of myths, but in his perception that they spring from similar attitudes and exertions of the human mind. Our conclusion that a certain story is mythical may be reached, not because the story is so exceptional, so unusual, but sometimes because it is so common. Take the story of William Tell. It is a story which lies entirely within the bounds of possibility ; it contains no element of the miraculous. When we find, however, that there are several stories of the same kind, we may suspect that they are not all true. In that case we shall need some historic verification, some special authority for any of them ; in default of this we may be forced to the conclusion that they are all legendary cousins or rivals, elaborated from some germ of fact, or it may be from pure romance.

Celsus showed that the miracles of the New Testament were alike in kind with the miracles of the other religions, and should not therefore be regarded as exceptional. As he found a parallel for the story of Noah in the story of Deucalion, so he found parallels for the story of the resurrection of Jesus in the mythology with which he was familiar. Justin Martyr made similar comparisons. The story of the divine origin of Perseus suggested the virgin birth of Jesus ; the healing miracles of Æsculapius suggested those of the New Testament ; the ascension of Jesus that of Bellerophon. But it cannot be too often repeated that the main thing is not to show historic connection but mental similarity. The whole subject of comparative mythology in relation to the New Testament offers an inviting field for modern scholarship.

Applying these principles of interpretation to the New Testament, and approaching its books as we would approach the sacred books of any other period, free to take them exactly for what they are, what mythical and legendary elements do we discover in them ? On an earlier page I have indicated some of the classes



into which the New Testament material may be divided. In my limited space I do not propose to take up all the material or to justify by illustration all the divisions I have suggested. I shall confine myself mainly to the New Testament development of the Hebrew myths and to myths which seem to be clearly of New Testament origin through a rapid process of idealization.

(I) We find, as we might expect, that mythical elements in the Old Testament are adopted and accepted as history in the New, and that they powerfully shape certain elements in its teaching. Beginning with the epistles as the older documents, and taking those ascribed to Paul as our starting-point, beneath the vigorous argument, the independent thought and the practical tendencies of Paul's writings we see unmistakable traces of Hebrew mythology. Paul tells us that he had been a Hebrew of the Hebrews, and had been reared in their traditions. We are told how boldly and with what self-sacrifice and courage he abandoned their ritual and forms. Nevertheless, there were still certain mythological traditions which did not come at all into dispute. They lent themselves as easily to the Christian system as to the Hebrew, and could be employed with great effect. One of the most important of these was the Hebrew myth of the temptation and fall, a myth which we now know to have been written on Assyrian tables of stone, with a strong probability that the Hebrews themselves derived it from Assyrian sources. Its mythical character at least is self-evident. It is not surprising that Paul, following the thought of his time, should have treated the story of the fall as a historic event describing the origin of sin in the world. This myth, living in his day, has lived until our own, and Paul has had something to do in conserving its vitality. At times he refers to this and other Hebrew myths in a way which may be simply rhetorical, but he also builds much of his argument upon them. In 1 Cor. xv. 22 he accepts the view that natural death came through Adam's sin. In 2 Cor. xi. 3 he expresses his fear "lest by any means, as the serpent beguiled Eve in his craftiness, your minds should be corrupted from the simplicity and purity which is towards Christ." This use might be simply rhetorical, but it is probably based on his conception of the myth as a fact, not as a poem. In Rom. v. 12 there is an argument based on the Adamic myth: "Therefore, as through one man sin entered into the world, and death through sin; and so death passed upon all men, for that all have sinned." Here the reference may be partly literal and partly figurative.

Adam is used as a type of Christ. The figure, argument and contrast are continued for several verses. In 1 Tim. ii. 12 the myth of the fall is illogically used to enforce the subjection of women. "But I permit not a woman to teach nor to have dominion over a man, but to be in quietness, for Adam was first formed, then Eve, and Adam was not beguiled, but the woman being beguiled hath fallen into transgression."

In 1 Cor. x. 2 beautiful reference is made to the Old Testament legend of the passage of the Red Sea: "I would not, brethren, have you ignorant that all our fathers were under the cloud and all passed through the sea and were baptized unto Moses in the cloud and in the sea." In Galatians we have legends about Abraham and Sarah, used for illustration and argument. Our view of their mythical character will depend upon what proportion of reality or history we ascribe to these characters, but it is noticeable that the most marvelous elements in their history are used in the arguments.

In other New Testament epistles, notably 1 Peter iii. 20, we have the story of Noah, a mythical conception not confined to the Hebrews, but familiar to the Assyrians and the Greeks. "The long suffering of God waited in the days of Noah while the ark was a-preparing, where a few, that is, eight souls, were saved through water." It is used figuratively as a type of baptism and the resurrection, but, as the specification of eight souls seems to imply, with evident confidence as to its historic character. Again, in 2 Peter ii. and v.: "God spared not the ancient world, but preserved Noah with seven others, a preacher of righteousness, when he brought a flood upon the world of the ungodly." The flood is further referred to in the same epistle. There are references also to Lot, Sodom and Gomorrah; the story of Balaam's ass is literally accepted.

Another mythological conception of the Old Testament which has an important place in the New is that of Satan, the spirit of evil. Two questions which might be the subject of a separate essay I can only suggest. One is whether the Old Testament Satan was born of Persian dualism, and the second is how far and how independently the Old Testament conception was developed in the New. The article on Satan in Smith's "Bible Dictionary," by Rev. Alfred Berry, principal of Cheltenham College, assumes that in the Old Testament Satan remains in the background, but in the New is brought distinctly forward. The personality of Satan is regarded as a sure doctrine of revelation. Even



a casual glance at the New Testament will show the important part which Satan plays in the spiritual drama and how much superior he is in power and influence to the Satan that plagued Job. Paul apparently regards him as a person. He attributes his thorn in the flesh to Satan, "a messenger of Satan sent to buffet me." It was Satan that hindered him from going to the Thessalonians. In Jude we have a picture of Michael, the archangel, and the devil disputing. I need not enlarge on the place which Satan has in the Apocalypse, — that old serpent whom an angel binds and casts into a bottomless pit for a thousand years, after which he is to have another opportunity to deceive the nations.

In the gospels we have the dramatic picture of the temptation of Jesus by the devil and a host of references to devils and demons, the words *διάβολος* and *δαιμόν* both being used ; and there is a distinct reference to Beelzebub, the prince of demons. This order of beings called demons and angels is familiar in the Old Testament and in the New. We are equally familiar in the Greek pantheon with heavenly messengers, such as Iris, Hermes, Sleep and other agents of the gods. In Christianity the messengers of God have varied offices. Angels are the executants of the divine decrees. It is an angel who speaks to Paul on his voyage, who rescues Peter from prison, who ministers to Jesus, who smites Herod because he gave not God the glory. Then there is the passage, Col. ii. 18, "Let no man rob you of your prize by a voluntary humility and worshiping of the angels." On the other hand in the passage in 1 Cor. vi. 2, Paul makes the saints the judges of the world and even of the angels. Jude has a picture of angels which kept not their first estate, who are reserved in everlasting chains under darkness unto the judgment of the great day. Angels abound in the Apocalypse and have beautiful ministries in the gospels. The literature on this subject is vast.

We have seen how natural it was for Christianity to adopt a good deal of the current mythology of the Old Testament as simple history. It was a part of its heritage. It also took, as in the conception of Satan, certain Old Testament myths and gave them new illustration and development. There was another element which had a great influence upon the composition of the New Testament. I mean Old Testament prophecy. It furnished many germs which grew and flowered into Christian thought and sometimes assumed mythical forms. For illustrations I need refer only to Professor Toy's admirable work, "Quotations in the New Testament."

II. And now the question arises, Is there not also a New Testament mythology which, if not wholly independent of Hebraic or other sources, is distinctively Christian in its development? The answer we get from the New Testament, it seems to me, is very definite. We can see there the fresh and distinct operation of the mythologizing tendency as it gathers around personality. This adoration of a person is not without important relation to the Old Testament conception of the Messiah. That furnished the atmosphere and the soil on which the new myth sprung, but personality gave it its immense vitality. Some have taken the ground that Jesus was absolutely a myth. On the contrary, I believe that his deification was hastened by the fact that he had actually lived and died. This idealization was a process of apotheosis, which finds illustration in other ancient religions and most distinctly in those of Greece and Rome. While there were purely imaginary heroes translated and personalized, perhaps, from conceptions of nature, there was also the worship of deified men. These honors were sometimes bestowed in the lifetime of the hero, as in the case of Alexander the Great and of Lysander. In the Oriental mind such an ascription to a living person might be simply flattery. When it was conferred after death and associated with regal power and with ideas of the divinity of the state, as in the case of the Roman emperors, it was patriotic and religious. The apotheosis conferred upon sixty persons by the Roman Senate from the time of Cæsar to that of Constantine was an official honor; but in respect to a man like Marcus Aurelius, his exalted character must have been of great influence in helping the deification. He was long worshiped as a household divinity. Celsus (*Origen contra Cel.* 3, 36) refers to the worship of Antinous in Egypt, which was maintained a century after his birth.

The deification of mortals is thus an established fact in religious history. So we may trace the apotheosis of Jesus in the New Testament. It would be interesting if we could follow its growth in chronological order. This we cannot easily do. We cannot speak with certainty of the dates of gospels and epistles. We can only approximate a chronological order by taking the older and undisputed epistles first and the gospels afterwards. This is all I attempt here. More important than the order of time is the order of ideas, the various stages in a process of apotheosis; but even these cannot be rigidly classified, simply because the imagination in the same period of time may act with far more vehemence in one person than in another, and because it does not



always move step by step, but sometimes with the rush of wings.

Taking the first epistles ascribed to Paul, there is a distinct difference in the degree of adoration paid to Jesus in Romans, Corinthians and Galatians, and in the other epistles traditionally ascribed to him. This difference is so great as to have led some critics, notably Baur, to deny the Pauline authorship of all but Romans, Corinthians and Galatians. Such an important question cannot be decided on these grounds alone, for it is quite possible that this mythological conception of Christ constantly grew in the mind of the apostle, until it attained its later intensity. Other questions of style and internal evidence must enter into that determination. It would be interesting to know just where Paul himself stopped in the apotheosis of Jesus. Nevertheless I suspect that Dr. Albert Réville is right in saying we must admit that the idealization of Christ which is found in the disputed epistles of Paul has its germs in the epistles whose authorship is undisputed. "Perhaps," as he says, "we should speak less of the Christology of Paul and more of a Pauline Christology." This Christology, whether it be of Paul or of his followers, is essentially mythological at its highest point. Christianity set itself as strongly as did Hebraism against the worship of the powers of nature and the idolatrous use of images, but it apparently set no bounds to the idealization of humanity. That was not complete until the peasant of Nazareth was enthroned on the right hand of God. The process by no means stopped with the New Testament; but the limits of my essay will not permit me to go beyond its pages, to trace in the councils of the Church the final elevation of Jesus as a member of the triune deity.

In Paul's epistles the historic Jesus is almost ignored. Paul had not known him. He gives us no traditions of his life, no description of his person. He does not quote from his discourses; he knows nothing of his miraculous birth. Paul was preaching the risen, the ascended Christ. He idealizes from the start.

In Romans we have Christ presented as the Lord of the living and the dead, as the Judge of the world (ii. 16) and great stress is laid upon his sacrifice; but he is still the son of God. His subordination is complete.

In Galatians we have Christ giving himself for our sins. Paul is confident that this gospel was not from man, but by the revelation of Jesus Christ. In the fullness of time God sent forth his Son, made of a woman under the law (Gal. iv. 4). The disciples

were likewise addressed as sons of God. In this grand epistle, with its magnificent appeal for a spiritual Christianity, with its bold protest against the bondage of forms and rituals of the old dispensation, Paul is far from any adoration of Christ except that revealed in vi. 14, "But far be it from me to glory save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, through which the world hath been crucified unto me and I unto the world." There is no utterance in this epistle which cannot be reconciled with the humanity of Jesus Christ and his exalted sonship in God. Jesus is a rewarder and revenger, the Son and Lord. Likewise in 2 Thessalonians, but there is no intimation of equality with God.

In Corinthians Christ is presented as the power and wisdom of God. His lordship is assumed. There is a hint of his preëxistence: "Neither let us tempt the Lord" (some manuscripts say Christ), "as some of them tempted, and perished by serpents" (1 Cor. x. 9); as if the sins of the Israelites in the Old Testament were committed against him. Paul here is an undoubted monotheist. There is but one central deity around whom all lesser lights revolve. "For though there be that are called gods, whether in heaven or on earth; as there are gods many, and lords many; yet to us there is one God, the Father, of whom are all things, and we unto him; and one Lord, Jesus Christ, through whom are all things, and we through him" (1 Cor. viii. 5, 6). The supremacy and the unity of God are undisputed. Christ is to be victorious over all his enemies, the last being death; and then the Son is to be subject to God, that God may be all in all.

In Ephesians we pass to a warmer zone. The Christology is more glowing. We see Jesus raised by God from the dead, sitting at His right hand in heavenly places, far above all principalities and power and might and dominion and every name that is named, not only in this world, but also in that which is to come (Eph. i. 21). This ardent idealization goes on through the epistle, yet it is free from theistic dualism or tritheism. The absolute supremacy of the Father is still preserved, as in the passage, "One Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is above all and through all and in you all" (Eph. iv. 6).

When we come to Colossians, the apotheosis of Jesus is carried into the outer realm of deity. He is made the creator of the heavens and the earth, "the image of the invisible God, the first born of all creation, for in him were all things created in the heavens and upon the earth, things visible and things invisible,

whether thrones or dominions or principalities or powers:” “all things have been created through him and unto him” (Col. i. 16). He is represented as sitting on the right hand of God.

Thus far, (excepting slight hints of preëxistence,) the apotheosis of Jesus is wholly consistent with his humanity, as in the case of the apotheosis of a Roman emperor. But the process could not stop here. In Philippians the preëxistence of Christ seems to be taught as an attribute of his divinity. In the disputed verse (Philip. ii. 6) he is represented as existing in the form of God; and however we may translate the expression ἀρπαγμὸν, he is described as putting aside all aspiration for equality with God and as taking upon himself the form of a servant, as being made in the likeness of man, and “being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself, becoming obedient even unto death, yea, the death of the cross. Wherefore also God highly exalted him, and gave unto him the name which is above every name; that in the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of things in heaven and things on earth and things under the earth, and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father” (Philip. ii. 8–11).

The exaltation of Jesus flames in the opening chapter of Hebrews: “God, having of old time spoken unto the fathers in the prophets by divers portents and in divers manners, hath at the end of these days spoken unto us in his Son, whom he appointed heir of all things, through whom also he made the worlds; who being the effulgence of his glory, and the very image of his substance, and upholding all things by the word of his power, when he had made purification of sins, sat down on the right hand of the Majesty on high; having become by so much better than the angels, as he hath inherited a more excellent name than they” (Heb. i. 1–5). Then the writer proceeds by text and argument to show how much more exalted the Son is than the angels. In this same epistle light is thrown on the conception of Jesus by a free use of other mythical elements in the Old Testament, notably that of Melchizedek, king of Salem, “without father, without mother, without descent, having neither beginning of days nor end of life, but made like unto the Son of God.”

In 1 Peter, likewise, it is said of Jesus, “having gone into heaven and is on the right hand of God, angels and authorities and powers being made subject unto him” (1 Pet. 22). Waiving the question of the genuineness of 2 Peter (for I am dealing with



the books of the New Testament as they are bound in the present canon, and this serves well to illustrate the tendency of that age), we find in the first chapter of this epistle the strong suspicion of the writer that miraculous traditions will not be accepted even in that day unless attested by personal evidence, and that the divine exaltation of Jesus might be regarded as fabulous unless thus supported. "For we did not follow cunningly devised fables, when we made known unto you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but we were eye-witnesses of his majesty. For he received from God the Father honor and glory, when there came such a voice to him from the excellent glory, This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased. And this voice we *ourselves* heard come out of heaven, when we were with him in the holy mount" (2 Peter i. 16-19). The writer is already appealing to a tradition of the divine attestation of Jesus against the skepticism of his own day. There is also an attempt to support this evidence by argument from prophecy and by the assumption that prophecy did not come by the will of man, but holy men of God spake, moved by the Holy Ghost.

Still another conception connected with the exaltation and triumph of Jesus in the epistles was that of a dramatic resurrection which is heralded in the trump that sounds in the fifteenth chapter of 1 Corinthians, and which is brought out again in 1 Thess. iv. 16, "For the Lord himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of an archangel, and with the trump of God: and the dead in Christ shall rise first." And in 2 Thess. i. 8 we have a picture of Jesus, revealed from heaven "with the angels of his power in flaming fire, rendering vengeance to them that know not God and to them that obey not the gospel of our Lord Jesus: who shall suffer punishment: even eternal destruction from the face of the Lord and from the glory of his might." In 2 Peter iii. 10 there is a vivid picture of the end of the world in which the Lord comes as a thief and in which the heavens shall pass away with a great noise and the elements shall melt with fervent heat, and the earth also, and the works that are there shall be burned up. There is promise of a new heaven and a new earth wherein dwelleth righteousness.

These fervid images suggest the imagery of the Apocalypse. It is an interesting question whether the series of pictures that book contains, some of them beautiful and some grotesque, are the growth of mythical and archaic traditions. It seems probable that, in its present form, this book is the product of one highly

wrought mind who had felt the influence of the visionary prophecies of Ezekiel and Daniel in the Old Testament. But whatever its origin, it is to be noted that the apotheosis of Jesus which appears in the book, though it takes different forms, is not carried higher and further than in the epistles.

Let us now turn to the Gospel narratives. We at once perceive that, like the epistles, they differ greatly in their character. Matthew and Luke are different from Mark, and John is distinctly different from the others. Modern New Testament criticism points to Mark as embodying the earliest tradition. It is here that we find the life of Jesus described with the greatest simplicity. Though we have the voice from heaven, the temptation by Satan, and the ministering angels, there is lacking altogether, as also in the epistles, the elaborate introductory mythology of Matthew and the still more elaborate mythology of Luke. Mark knows nothing of Jesus of Bethlehem; it is Jesus of Nazareth. His ministry begins with his baptism by John. His sonship is here attested by divine manifestation. It is in these two later Gospels, Matthew and Luke, that Christian mythology becomes more vivid, more audacious, and bursts into brilliant efflorescence.

It would be a task beset with insuperable difficulty, to seek to separate Jesus' view of his nature and mission from the view of him set forth by his disciples. When we remember that our only material for judging what Jesus thought of himself is derived wholly from his reporters, we can proceed with no certainty. Beneath all the miraculous gauze and Messianic draperies with which Jesus is surrounded in the Gospels, we cannot fail to discover the simplicity and moral eminence of the prophet who protests against any exaltation of his person by which his moral influence shall be diminished.

It is evident — and this is one proof of his humanity — that the Jesus of the Gospels accepted, for the most part, the mythology and the traditions of his own day. His views of demonology are those of his own time. His references to Noah and Jonah indicate a probable belief in their historic character, though this may be reportorial color. The Messianic conception has a strong influence on the Gospels. It is difficult to decide whether the disciples of Jesus imposed it upon him in the narrative, or whether it was something that he accepted himself; but it is noticeable that he is not made to appeal to a miraculous birth in proof of his mission. The mythical porticos to Matthew and Luke were later constructions. In the Pauline epistles the proof

of the divine power of Jesus seem to lie in his life, death, resurrection and exaltation, not in the special circumstances of his birth. References in the epistles indicate a natural birth of Davidic lineage: "When the fulness of the time came God sent forth his son born of a woman, born under the law" (Gal. iv. 4). "His son, who was born of the seed of David according to the flesh" (Rom. i. 3). "Jesus Christ of the seed of David" (2 Tim. ii. 8). When we find that no New Testament writers but Matthew and Luke teach the miraculous conception, and that no appeal to it is made by Jesus or his apostles, this silence is extremely significant.

There is another important fact. The genealogies in both Matthew and Luke are strenuous attempts to establish the Davidic descent of Jesus. These two genealogies are utterly irreconcilable with each other. They show that, at a time when it was felt necessary to appeal to genealogy, in conformity with the Hebrew tradition, in order to show the descent of the Messiah from David, there was no agreement as to the line of ancestry from which Jesus was derived. These genealogies would have had no significance if the father of Jesus were left out of the chain. Both of them describe the descent of the father of Jesus, whereas, if the miraculous conception were accepted at that time, they would naturally have given the genealogy of the mother. But there is no reference in the New Testament to the ancestry of his mother.

The story of the boy Jesus in the temple evidently contradicts the account of the miraculous birth. His mother was astonished at his understanding and answers, and said unto him: "Son, why hast thou thus dealt with us? Both thy father and I have sought thee sorrowing. And he said unto them, How is it that ye sought me? Wist ye not that I must be about my Father's business? And they understood not the saying which he spake unto them." Compare this with the elaborate annunciation made to Mary, the revelation of the angels and the joy of Simeon at seeing the infant, and it is easy to see that Mary ought not to have had the slightest surprise at the precociousness of her twelve-year-old boy. Indeed, she should rather have been surprised if he did not begin to fulfill the predictions made of him. Mary, at least, ought to have understood the matter. The fact that the stories of the miraculous birth were used to introduce the narratives in Matthew and Luke without regard to their inconsistency with the temple tradition, or with the genealogies, shows, as



Réville suggests, that at this stage of the composition of the Gospels, the compilers did not feel at liberty to reject traditions which had become current, even if they conflicted in character with other traditions. It cannot escape notice that the myths recorded in Matthew and Luke are of two different forms, and that in many of their details they are irreconcilable with each other. The scene of the annunciation is different in Luke from that of Matthew. Luke knows nothing of the visit of the Magi and the flight into Egypt. There are other differences which I have not now space to indicate. That no reconciliation was effected or attempted is an interesting proof of the spontaneous and independent character of these mythical elements. They are flowers of the imagination of different hue, but growing on the same soil.

The evidence is overwhelming, however, that the early Christians — the contemporaries of Jesus, his apostles and their immediate followers — knew nothing of the virgin birth, and that they thought of him as did the “many” described in Mark vi. 2-4, who found nothing in his birth to account for his remarkable teachings, and who said, “Is not this the carpenter, the son of Mary and brother of James, and Joses, and Judas, and Simon? and are not his sisters here with us?” As Harnack has well shown, the expression in the Apostles’ creed “born of the Virgin Mary” does not come from the Apostolic age, and has no Apostolic authority.

The question of the motive and the source of the miraculous story of the birth may be answered differently. In later times great dogmatic importance attached to the assumption that natural generation from Adam involved the guilt, or, at least, the stain, of the fall. We must beware of throwing this idea back upon the New Testament. The genealogies and the Gospels show, on the contrary, the proud effort which was made to establish the natural generation of Jesus from David, and in Luke clear back to Adam. This would not have been done if any taint of sin had been supposed to lurk in this derivation. Unusual circumstances marked the birth of Isaac, Samson and Samuel. The same tendency appears in the birth of John the Baptist, who was born against all probability.

The influence which early ascetic views may have had upon the narrative needs to be taken into account, but it is easy from the hint given in Matthew to connect this story at once with a misapplication of the prophecy of Is. vii. 14, “Behold a young woman

shall conceive and bear a son and shall call his name Immanuel." This misapplication was favored by a mistranslation in the Septuagint; the Greek word *παρθενος*, "virgin," was used to render the Hebrew word *עלמה*, more properly rendered a "young woman," married or unmarried. In Matthew, in which every attempt was made to reconcile the birth and life of Jesus with Hebrew prophecy, this misunderstood text found an exegesis in the tradition of the virgin birth.

Among all the New Testament stories none are more mythical in character than these of the virgin birth. None show more distinctly the spirit of the old mythologies. The Hindu story of Krishna at once occurs to us, and Greek myths in which one parent was a god. The accomplished director of the Guimet Museum of Comparative Religions in Paris, with whom I conversed on this subject, assumes a direct relationship between the New Testament myth and the Hindu. But it seems to me that direct or conclusive evidence of this relationship is lacking. The historic derivation may be difficult to trace, either on this or any other line, but the psychological relationship between this and similar myths is evident.

The idea of the preëxistence of Jesus, which we have already noted in the Epistles, may have had its influence in creating the story, precisely as was the case with the Greek divinities who became incarnated in an exceptional way. Thus it is possible that the idealization of Jesus proceeded backwards, so to speak, from the conception of his resurrection and ascension to that of his preëxistence, and later to the story of his miraculous human birth. In any case, stories of the childhood of Jesus probably did not arise until after his death, when legend began to weave itself around his birth and early years.

It is important to note that, while the oldest Gospel sources do not contain this legend, the latest Gospel, that of John, does not contain it either. Not that it was necessarily unknown to the writer, but in the proem of John we have a metaphysical or philosophical foundation for the life of Jesus, which was thought superior to the poetic narratives of Matthew and Luke. The idealization of Jesus is boldly proclaimed at the start and his preëxistence and divinity. "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. The same was in the beginning with God. All things were made by him; and without him was not anything made that hath been made" (John i. 1).<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> The great mass of traditional material from which the Gospels were

The other Gospel stories which revolve round the life and personality of Jesus may be divided into two classes, — the miracles of healing and those which more arbitrarily display his power and authority.

Concerning the healing miracles we are not in a position to be dogmatic. Many of them, especially those relating to the healing of nervous diseases, come within the range of possibility. In this day of faith cure, mind cure, Christian Science and the Colorado Messiah, there are well-attested instances of rapid healing wrought through the relation of psychological to physiological laws. But assuming the possession and use of such a power by Jesus, any success in this direction had its influence in kindling the imagination of the multitude. Some of the stories were undoubtedly enlarged, expanded and ornamented with details and embellishments of the original fact. Other stories grew up which had no historic basis. I have not space in this paper to take up the miracles of healing in detail. A good example of the way in which these and other New Testament legends may be treated in the light of modern criticism is shown in the article on "The Raising of the Dead in the Synoptic Gospels," by Edwin A. Abbott, in the *NEW WORLD* for September, 1896. Dr. Abbott believes that bodily healing was far less frequent than the Synoptic Gospels would lead us to suppose. He holds that the miracle at Nain cannot be explained as fact, but may be explained as poetry; that it was not history, but "metaphor misunderstood."

The sending of the evil spirits into the swine is a more grotesque story, possibly showing what is foreign to the New Testament, a trace of ritualistic or satirical humor. To a Hebraic mind evil spirits might naturally find their abode in these unclean animals; and the act of Jesus in transferring them there might be construed as a tribute to the Mosaic ritual. It is noticeable that the story is told without any desire to shield the moral perfection of Jesus. The ethical questions involved in the destruc-

sifted is suggested in John xxi. 25: "And there are also many other things which Jesus did, the which, if they should be written every one, I suppose that even the world itself would not contain the books that should be written." Likewise, we find in the comment at the close of the same Gospel an indication of the way in which the writer in his time had seen a tradition grow up around the words of Jesus (xxi. 23): "This saying therefore went forth among the brethren, that that disciple should not die: yet Jesus said not unto him, that he should not die; but, If I will that he tarry till I come, what is that to thee?"



tion of so much property without regard to the owners of the swine were, apparently, not even thought of.

This story is a sort of bridge between the miracles of healing, in which the love and humanity of Jesus appear, and those which represent him as exercising power in an arbitrary and wanton way. One of these stories is the blasting of the fig-tree. Here the extraordinary physical power which is ascribed to Jesus is awarded to him at the expense of his moral serenity and good temper. It reminds us of the story of the Apocryphal Gospels of his withering the arm of the teacher who was about to strike him. Likewise, when Jesus is described in the Epistles as coming to take vengeance on his enemies, we feel that the picture of his martial power is morally inferior to the picture of the good shepherd who seeks and saves that which is lost, and is totally inconsistent with the non-resistant preaching of the Sermon on the Mount. The stories of the feeding of the multitude and of the miraculous draught of fishes may be an enlargement of some natural germ of experience.

Distinctly mythical in form and material seems the story of the turning of the water into wine. The stilling of the tempest is akin to stories of Neptune and Poseidon, though these Greek and Roman divinities were just as likely to set the sea in commotion when the humor served them. The injunction to Peter to catch a fish, in which he should find a piece of money, may have grown from a proverb or metaphor.

If the story of the miraculous birth of Jesus furnishes the dawn to the Gospels, the story of the resurrection furnishes its sunset. It is interesting to note that, as with the miracles of healing, a large number of people are willing to-day to regard the reappearance of Jesus after death as possible who would not have so regarded it twenty-five or thirty years ago. This is largely due to the influence of modern spiritualism. A few Unitarian ministers, neither superstitious nor uncritical, who are supposed to represent the rationalism of the day, still regard the New Testament story of the reappearance of Jesus as coming within the limits of human experience. They would take the resurrection out of the category of exceptional occurrences and make it a natural event, to the extent of admitting the power of Jesus to manifest himself after death in a spiritual body. It is clear, however, that in the Gospels it was regarded as unnatural and extraordinary. In view of the mass of psychological phenomena presented to us to-day for explanation, we cannot be dogmatic

concerning such phenomena as are recorded in the story of the resurrection, whether we consider them as subjective or otherwise. Nevertheless, in spite of all that modern spiritualism has attempted, thus far we have no instance, universally accepted, of a single human being returning after death, and thus furnishing incontestable proof of a life beyond the grave. The more recent attempts of spiritualistic mediums to produce direct material and visible evidence of the return of spirits in the phenomena known as "materialization" may be characterized as trickery of the most materialistic kind. The general disinclination of spiritualists to submit these phenomena to scientific investigation is a lamentable confession of weakness. The story of the resurrection of Jesus may be assigned, on the other hand, to an order of myths not uncommon in other religions. They may have had their origin in psychical beliefs or experiences; but like the virgin birth, they naturally form a part of the idealization or apotheosis of the central hero.

The dramatic story of the ascension appears in two of the Gospels and is given in more detail in the Acts. It suggests a throng of similar stories in Greek and other mythologies, in which the god or divine messenger miraculously returned to the heavenly abode, after finishing his work on earth.

The aureole which the imagination placed around the head of Jesus was soon kindled round the heads of his apostles. This is already seen in the Gospels. Dr. E. A. Abbott, in the article mentioned, asserts that the later the Gospel, the more it says about the apostolic miracles. This growing tendency is further developed in the Acts of the Apostles. While a large portion of the book proceeds with smoothness, graphic detail and the circumstance of historic narrative, the miraculous powers ascribed to the apostles are brought sufficiently into the foreground. Some of the miracles are of the healing order, such as the restoration of Eutychus from the dead, and we find the multitude sending handkerchiefs and aprons to Paul to be blessed by him for the healing of the sick. But there are illustrations also of the exercise of unusual power, to attest the divine commission or to punish offenders. Peter is miraculously delivered from prison; Ananias and Sapphira are struck dead for lying; Paul temporarily blinds a sorcerer. Discourses in the Acts, on the other hand, are singularly free from claims of miraculous power. The full development of the mythical spirit around the apostles was to take place in a later time and find exuberant manifestations in a mass of

legends, until, finally, infallibility was ascribed to the words and writings of all the apostles, and that infallibility was extended to the supposed successors of Saint Peter.

The Acts of the Apostles affords us two interesting illustrations of the rapid way in which even the apostles themselves might be deified. Paul and Barnabas were preaching and healing in Lycaonia, and the people cried out, "The gods have come down to us in the likeness of man." They called Barnabas Jupiter, and Paul Mercury, because he was the chief speaker. It was with the greatest difficulty that the eloquence of Paul restrained the priests of Jupiter and the people from sacrificing to Barnabas and himself. Likewise, after the shipwreck of Saint Paul, the people of Melita, when they saw the serpent light on his hand, were disposed to think he was a murderer, whom justice had overtaken; but when, without harm, he had cast off the serpent, they changed their minds and thought he was a god. These stories well illustrate the tendency of that age in a Greek or Syriac Greek community. It was still as natural to believe that a man of extraordinary power was a god in disguise as it was in the Homeric Age. It reminds us again that it is not necessary to suppose that Jesus never existed in order to account for his mythical elevation. The myth had a historical kernel in an extraordinary personality, and we may be justified in drawing some conclusions as to the character of Jesus from the halo of adoration which gathered around him. The Greek influence upon Christianity was soon to be felt in Christian philosophy, but this illustration from the Acts shows that it was early felt in Christian mythology. It was easy under that influence to deify a man even when he was living. The protest which Christianity, under the inspiration of Hebrew monotheism, made against this form of idolatry did not save it from the consequences of that tendency, as the divine honors paid to Jesus and to his mother, and the mythical powers ascribed to the apostles, sufficiently prove.

As for that mythical form of apotheosis by which Jesus became a member of the Trinity, it cannot be found in the New Testament. We simply find there the seed from which it naturally grew when steeped in the Greek mind. But if we cannot find the Trinity in the New Testament, neither can we maintain that Peter and Paul were Unitarians, in the modern sense of that term. In the late Epistles Jesus is more God than man; it is easier to confound him with God than to identify him with



man. This is the Scriptural justification of Trinitarianism or rather of the dualism which has taken that name; for it can hardly be said that the Holy Ghost has been equally honored with the other members of the Trinity.

In conclusion, let me emphasize the importance of a fresh study of New Testament mythology at this time. Many years have been spent in the study of textual criticism, centuries in verbal exegesis, and in the present century a new impulse has been given to the study of the historic aspects of the New Testament. We need now to study with more diligence and thoroughness its poetic and mythical elements. As the result of such study, we shall comprehend better the spirit, mind and character of the writers of that age. We shall see that it was not an age of definition, that its conceptions were not expressed in dogma any more than the theology of Homer was put into dogma and creed. The New Testament myths throw an invaluable light on the whole subsequent history of Christian theology. They show how myths may harden into definition and creed, and become a trammel instead of an inspiration to religious thought and feeling. When we have examined their origin and traced their development, we have in most cases disposed of their assumptions. Dr. Martineau has called attention to the great damage done by the extravagant development of the Messianic conception.

On the other hand, we shall find new points of sympathy with the early Christian age in that enthusiasm which led it to idealize humanity for humanity's sake. The study of the form which this enthusiasm took, though radiating into pictures which are conflicting and contradictory, cannot fail to be of the profoundest interest. The student of the life of Jesus, by taking away the mythical wrappings which have surrounded him, may get closer to his simple humanity; but poetic and imaginative pictures of him and his life are necessary to the total impression of his character, and reveal also, and sometimes more strongly, the character of the age upon which it was wrought. In our own age the idealization still goes on, and within lines of possibility and imitation.

Democracy has wrought but one greater triumph than when it took a peasant of Galilee and raised him to the throne of God; it was when it raised the same peasant to the acme of moral perfection as the ideal of our humanity. By no accident of history but by the inevitable forces of moral evolution he and his disciples, for eighteen hundred years, have been photographed

into a composite picture of moral excellence ; and we, as we look steadfastly into this face, beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, are changed from glory to glory even as by the spirit of the Lord.

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